

ShadowBound 167

Chapter 167: Fight With The Horrors

Lucian's face paled. "An Advanced Horror? Are you serious? We just took down a Titanborne—"

"I know," Liam interrupted, his voice clipped. "That's the problem."

Lucian clenched his fists, the gauntlet rings on his fingers faintly glowing. "How do we deal with something like that in our state?"

"I don't mind if the two of us combine our strength and try to take them down, but that doubles the risk of getting injured since we'd be forced to protect the others and fight these demons at the same time," Liam said, crouching behind a thick bush alongside Lucian near the cave.

"You're right," Lucian muttered, his expression thoughtful. "Besides, our actions might be considered selfish and reckless by the academy."

"Probably," Liam agreed. "We need to wake the others."

Lucian nodded, and the two moved toward the cave to rouse their teammates. But just as they stepped forward, a thunderous roar erupted from roughly 80 meters away. The sheer force of the sound sent a shockwave rippling through the air, pushing against their bodies like a heavy gust of wind.

"Looks like whatever that was just made our job easier," Lucian remarked grimly, his eyes snapping toward the source of the roar.

As they turned, the moonlight illuminated a sight that sent shivers down their spines.

The creature stood on two legs, towering at nearly ten feet tall, its frame monstrous and imposing. Cracked, obsidian-like skin glimmered faintly in the moonlight, with veins of molten energy pulsating through it. It had no eyes, only a massive, gaping maw brimming with rows of razor-sharp teeth. Curved horns jutted forward from the sides of its head, and its claws looked sharp enough to carve through steel. A serrated, spiked tail swayed behind it like a predator waiting to strike.

Around its feet were countless glowing red eyes, piercing through the darkness like embers from a raging inferno.

Lucian's face paled as he processed the terrifying figure. "What the hell is that thing?"

"An Advanced Horror," Liam said flatly, unsheathing his daggers, his expression unflinching.

Lucian's voice wavered as he pointed toward the glowing eyes. "Wait—you said there were only three normal Horrors. Then what's with all those eyes?"

"There are three," Liam replied coldly. "That's just how many eyes they each have."

Lucian's jaw tightened, his nerves fraying. 'To hell with all this endless spawning of demons,' he thought bitterly.

Before they could strategize, the rest of their team emerged from the cave—Edith, Karla, and Robin—all looking worried and confused, their expressions turning to horror as they laid eyes on the creature in the distance.

Karla was the first to react, her hands flying to her mouth as her eyes widened in terror. She opened her mouth to scream, but no sound came out.

"Everyone, grab your weapons," Liam commanded, his voice cutting through the tense air. His crimson gaze never wavered from the monstrosity before them. "We've got another fight to handle."

Suddenly, the creature raised one massive hand, stretching it forward as if issuing an order. The glowing eyes at its feet vanished all at once, scattering into the forest with unnerving speed.

Silence fell, broken only by the rustle of leaves as something approached.

— —

Back in the observation room at the academy, Galen, Magnus, and Mystica sat watching intently, the flickering magic screens displaying Liam's group as they faced down their demons. Galen and Magnus lounged in the back row, while Mystica occupied a seat in the middle

"Damn, Moony," Magnus teased, his voice light and playful as he munched on an endless supply of popcorn. "Did you secretly teach the kid how to sense demons from this far away, or is that just part of his charm?"

Mystica smirked, her gaze never leaving the screen. "Of course not. You should know how his kind are. He's always been able to sense auras and detect threats—or allies—with ease. He claims he's only ever faced one demon before coming to the academy, but who knows? Maybe he's just naturally gifted."

Magnus raised an eyebrow, a grin spreading across his face. "Woah. Damn, you two lovebirds really produced one hell of a talented kid."

"Think so?" Mystica replied, her voice dripping with mischief. "I might just have a very fruitful worm." She added the last part with a teasing edge, clearly enjoying Galen's discomfort as his eye twitched in irritation.

"Sometimes I wonder how I even ended up in this friend circle," Galen muttered, exasperated, running a hand over his face.

Both Magnus and Mystica laughed in unison, their amusement infectious but also clearly teasing.

"By the way," Magnus continued, his tone still casual, "shouldn't we be helping the kids with this? I mean, they just finished fighting a Titanborne, and now there's a Malgath and three Skivoks? The Headmaster might have a few words for us if we just let them fight this on their own."

"No need to worry. Whether the Headmaster gets angry or not, the kids need to face this on their own. Real battlefields don't give you time to rest or recover. They need to learn that now, rather than later." Galen said with a bored expression on his face as he rested his head on his hand.

"Yes, yes, thank the stars you said that," Magnus laughed, tossing another handful of popcorn into his mouth. "If anything goes wrong, though, the blame's on you, Galen," he added cheekily.

"Whatever," Galen muttered, unfazed by the banter.

Mystica's lips curled into a sly smile as she adjusted herself in her seat. "Alright, if that's what you two want, no problem. But if things go south, I'm sending both of you to clean it up. Got it?"

Magnus grinned, not missing a beat. "Yes, ma'am. But won't that be a bit of overkill? I mean, just one of us could handle those demons without breaking a sweat."

Mystica's eyes flicked to him with a sly smile. "Alright, Magpie, I'll send only you."

— —

Back in Vlardia, Edith, Karla, and Robin hurried to grab their weapons, steeling themselves for whatever creatures lurked within the shadows of the forest. The group assembled in a tight formation, backs to one another, their eyes scanning the surrounding darkness, hearts pounding as they tried to guess where the impending threat would emerge.

"Does anyone know what kind of Horror this is—or what these incoming ones even are?" Lucian asked, his voice tense as his gaze darted around.

"I've read about a few types," Liam replied calmly, "but I've never seen any information about one like that."

Karla and Edith exchanged uneasy glances, equally clueless about the monstrosities they were about to face. The uneasy silence lingered until Robin broke it, his voice trembling.

"I—I know what that big one is. That's a Malgath. Normally, they're just regular Horrors—smaller with just a horn. But... this one's different. It must've gone through hibernation and evolved into something else. If I'm right, it's now an Advanced Horror." He swallowed hard, his fear palpable.

"How annoying," Lucian muttered, his irritation clear. "An Advanced Horror, of all things, attacking in the middle of the night right after we just fought a freaking Titanborne? Classic demon trash." As he spoke, he caught sight of the Malgath's expression—or what he swore was a grin.

'Did that piece of trash just grin?' Lucian thought, momentarily stunned.

Karla's voice broke the tension, rising in panic. "We're so gonna die! Why hasn't the academy sent anyone to save us yet? They said they wouldn't let us get harmed, right?"

"Hey, Karla, get yourself together!" Edith snapped, trying to cut through her friend's fear. "We can still do this, as long as we work—"

A sudden, ear-piercing shriek silenced Edith mid-sentence. A blur of movement descended from above, a skeletal creature lunging at her and Karla with claws poised to tear through them. In a flash, Liam moved, intercepting the attack with his dagger, deflecting the claws and slamming his body into the creature. The force sent it skidding to the side, snarling as it scrambled to its feet.

"T—That's a... Skivok," Robin stammered, his voice quivering as the moonlight revealed the creature in its horrifying entirety.

The Skivok stood on all fours about 4 feet high and 7 feet long. It's skeletal frame impossibly thin, with skin stretched tightly over visible bones. Its grotesque face bore two forward-facing eyes, two more on each side of its head, and four gaping holes in the front that served as its nostrils. Its mouth, a perpetual, fanged grin, was lined with endless rows of jagged teeth. Despite its emaciated appearance, it had elongated limbs and two razor-sharp claws at the end of each limb.

Liam let out a low, measured sigh, standing as a barrier between the Skivok and his group. Without turning fully, he glanced over his shoulder at Karla, his glowing red eyes piercing through the darkness.

"Hey, Karla," he said, his voice calm. "I'll say this once, so listen well. I heard you played a big role in bringing the Titanborne to its knees earlier. You did great."

Karla froze, her panic momentarily halted by Liam's words.

"But let me make something clear. Ever since you accepted the risk of taking this exam, you should've known this kind of thing could happen. So, stop whatever pity party you've got going on, pick up your sword, and stand up."

He paused, his glare intensifying. "Because if you don't, I don't know about the others, but you won't make it out of here alive."